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ABSTRACT

In this article the authors have summarized what appears to be the most important implications coming from the recent research on teaching behaviors in reading. This study indicated that: (1) trained teachers display method prescriptions while untrained teachers do not; (2) teacher personality influences teaching behavior; and (3) because teachers have difficulty gauging the ability level of children, they place children into reading ability groups according to some non-competence based criteria established to determine their learning potential. Teachers were also found to be the predominant actors in the classroom, because they restrict--quantitatively and qualitatively--the participation of children. The potential of child-child interaction are seldom recognized as a part of the learning situation. There is, in the author's opinion, a need for future research to explore children's visible attributes, which teachers use for judging their learning potential, and to explore the kind of inservice training needed to promote the occurrence of teaching behaviors which help children learn. (Author/WR)

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# TEACHING BEHAVIORS IN READING INSTRUCTION

A Summary Report Presented to
The National Conference on
Research in English

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What distinguishes good teachers from their colleagues? Which of the ingredients comprising their behaviors contribute to making a teacher outstanding? The general concensus that a good teacher has pupils who not only achieve but also enjoy doing so is not sufficient to describe such an individual, for these may be considered reflections or outcomes, not specific characteristics or behaviors of the teacher. Similar family backgrounds, levels of education, and work experiences are not equivalent to one teaching result. With all of these factors held constant in teachers different effects on children are produced. It is a temptation to declare that good teachers are born, not made; however, those of us committed to the value of the educational process felt uneasy about such a nebulous qualification. Without a firm statement of what the good teacher actually does, we find it difficult to justify our claim that a "born" teacher with education would be even better.

To focus on discovering behaviors of teachers in classroom seems a logical beginning, for teachers do not communicate at an intuitive level but through their behaviors. Children receive perceptible signals. Studying the patterning and categories of teaching behaviors should help teachers to shape their own behaviors toward more effective educative relationships with children.

Isolated teaching behaviors which can neither be remembered nor discussed in a meaningful way are not as significant to study as are the grouping of overt behaviors exhibited by the participants or members in the classroom according to more or less objective and explicit categories of behavior. The members themselves emit behaviors according to the ordering of cognitive and affective structures and their content. If study results are to influence teaching behaviors, we will have to discover how teachers can perceive categories of behavior which are not already a part of their own repetoire. That is, how they can reorganize and change the focus of their existing mental structures and integrate new ones.

Teaching Behavior Reflecting Method Prescriptions

Method prescriptions for teaching behaviors are more or less explicit in the major contemporary approaches for reading instruction. For example, the various basal reader series carry step-by-step prescriptions for teachers to follow in the reading program. Proponents of the Language Experience and other approaches also proceed in instruction according to method prescriptions. Several investigators studied whether or not the method prescriptions were carried out by teachers in practice. They wanted to discover if observed teaching behaviors are distinctively expressive of an approach.

Harris and Serwer (1966) found that teachers who were proponents of different approaches did show disparate classroom behaviors according to their approach. The different methods and behaviors reflecting them were, however, equally effective by third grade for teaching children to achieve in reading. They also found that teachers whose behaviors were most characteristic of their approach helped children to higher achievement in reading. For Harris and Serwer (1966), then, we could say that there is not just one set of effective teaching behaviors when long range reading achievement is an objective.

Kendrick and Bennett (1966) in their earlier study found as did Harris (1968) that teacher classroom behaviors reflected method prescriptions and were different for different approaches. They also found the various methods differentially effective for different learning objectives and within different subgroups of the population.

Chall and Feldman's (1966) most effective teachers were those of both methods who showed in their behavior, competence, a thinking approach to learning, sound-symbol emphasis, and an appropriate level of the lesson. They did not train the teachers of their study and many of them did not display behaviors reflecting method prescriptions. Chall and Feldman found that many

teachers may claim that they are proponents of a particular method but do not reflect method prescriptions in their classroom behaviors; their pupils did not achieve as well as those who did adhere to the established teaching guidelines for an approach.

The above studies appear to suggest that method prescriptions when followed, can be an important influence on teacher behavior and, when teachers are well-versed in them, they result in child reading achievement. Therefore, education and supervision of teachers according to method prescriptions may have a definite influence on teacher behaviors and child achievement.

Investigators of classroom interaction have shown that teacher questions consume a very large part of reading instruction. When questioning behavior is central to reading instruction, teachers, by their questions, can limit child participation to specific literal answers or can prompt the child to expand on or originate on a topic. By the level of their questions they can help a child to give right or error responses. Thus, by their questions, teachers can control the general quality of performance of the child in reading instruction.

Guszak (1967) found teachers, who claimed they were basal reader proponents, asked questioned which allowed only low level responses from children of a literal and specific-as-to-content-nature. Attempting to explain why teachers use predominantly low level questions, he proposed that such behavior might arise in the teacher's perception of children's ability level. Guszak found, however, that even in higher grade levels teachers continued to ask low level questions. On the few occasions when teachers did ask questions leading to more complex thought they were too difficult, forcing children to make error responses with teachers paying little attention to response congruence. Teachers did not seem able to gauge their questions to the thinking abilities

of children. It should be noted here that Chall and Feldman (1966) found effective teachers geared their lessons to the ability level of children. Perhaps this lack of success in reaching the thought level of children is what leads teachers to fall back on literal and specific questions. Also, from the hastiness of their retreat and their inattentiveness to higher level responses, we must conclude that many teachers see reading instruction, even for advanced grades, as a committment to the specific and literal aspects of reading content.

In a study similar to Guszak's, Haffner and Slobodian (1969) obtained supportive results. In both research report the investigators faulted basal reader prescriptions for this restriction of the quality of child participation.

Bartolome (1969) like Chall and Feldman (1966) found that teachers who said they were basal reader proponents did not exhibit behaviors prescribed by their approach. He asked teachers to prepare their own objectives for reading instruction and found their classroom behaviors not to be related to the realization of these objectives. Thus, teachers, without help, seem unable to translate statements of objectives into constructive teaching behaviors in the classroom. In contrast to Guszak, and Haffner and Slobodian, Bartolome stated that following basal reader prescriptions would have led teachers to provide opportunities for higher levels of thought in the reading program.

Browne's (1971) analysis of protocol-like data revealed once again that teachers did not gear the level of their lessons to the abilities of children and often were asked questions that children could not answer. While response incongruity was usually ignored for more complex questions, it was attended to for children engaged in the early skill level of learning to read and resulted in their making many error responses. Teachers, she states, appeared to find little flexibility in early reading content to enable them to find sufficient

lower level questions to provide children with opportunities to make correct responses. In light of all of the above, it does not seem inappropriate to question the heavy use of questioning behavior in early reading instruction.

Wolf, Huck, and King (1967) found that with instruction and the provision of special materials teachers could learn to make use of higher level questions in the classroom situation. As a result of using such questions to discuss specially prepared reading materials, their students performed better on tests designed to measure critical reading abilities. They did not explore questioning behavior of teachers in the earliest stages of reading instruction.

Morrison (1968) found that teachers who made exclusive use of basal texts in reading instruction showed less interactive and individualized behaviors than did teachers who used more than one text or who used the Language Experience approach. Children in single text classrooms displayed fewer interactive and more negative behaviors. Morrison found single basal text teachers asking questions at a rate of about sixty per thirty minute reading instruction period. Restriction of content seemed to limit both the pattern and quality of interaction.

Harris and Serwer (1966), however, did find slight advantages for the basal reader method over the Language Experience approach with respect to comprehension and attitude toward reading. Harris and Serwer also found that teachers who were most competent in their particular method and followed its prescriptions helped their students to higher achievement in reading. However, their most impressive and unique finding was that instructional reading time, not time spent in reading related activities, was positively correlated with reading achievement. Hence, it would seem

important to study the limits of the amount of instructional time beyond which there would be no further increases in achievement. In any such investigation we would want to remember that Harris and Serwer's teachers were competent in their method for it seems unlikely that, in light of the evidence reported in this paper, teachers in general would bring out greater reading achievement by increasing their instructional time.

These studies on questioning suggest to us that it is not enough for teachers to know about and be able to use different categories of questions; they must also know how and when to use them in a planned sequence. Effective teaching behavior must be interactive and take account of the receiver as well as the initiator.

## Teaching Behaviors Reflecting Teachers' Personality Variables

Anastasiow (1969) explored the source of teaching behaviors as reflections of teacher personality. The investigator stated that the evidence supports the view that teaching behaviors are expressions of different teacher personality styles and can be categorized for study within the framework of the Schaeffer model. The four behavior style categories of this model arise in combinations of love-hostility and autonomy-control. Love is displayed as teacher warmth. Autonomy implies that the teacher fosters the child's management of his own learning. High love and low control characterizes a Democratic teacher; low love and low control, a Laissez-Faire teacher; high love and high control, an Authoritarian teacher. Anastasiow found that teaching behavior was not susceptible to change when the curriculum objectives did not call forth behaviors which allowed for expression of the teacher's own personality.

Other studies examined the effects of these categories of behavior in the classroom. Teacher warmth is discussed as a category subsuming a variety of teaching behaviors. Soar (1965, 1968) found the optimal level of teacher criticism (less warmth) to be higher for reading skill learning than for either vocabulary learning or for increments in creative performance. He postulated that learning the skill of reading was a more literal task than vocabulary learning and that less teacher warmth in the early grades raises the tension level facilitating the learning of less complex tasks. Those tasks requiring more abstraction showed greater advance with increasingly less teacher criticism (i.e., warmth). Soar's teachers did not show frequent occurrences of disciplinary action but, those who were relatively less warm than teachers of high warmth helped children to better attain reading skills. He did not have any teachers in his study who displayed high criticism tallies. Harris, et.al.(1968) found that teachers who used numerous disciplinary statements received poor results from their students by third grade for skill learning and reading achievement.

Both the studies of Chall and Feldman (1966) and Wallen (1966) found tallies of high warmth in teacher classroom interaction to impede constructive student behaviors in the first grade. Children did not achieve as well with such teachers; also they did not like school and their teachers as well. According to Anastasiow (1969) study such teachers would display a Benevolent Controlling (or possibly an Authoritarian) teaching style. High praise is personal rather than objective, just as high criticism is. Perhaps this suggests to the child that he will be loved only if he performs in the way the teacher likes rather than according to his own judgements of what is right. He values his performance on the basis of teacher reaction, not on respecting his own judgements.

Brophy and Good (1970) found teachers to be more objective (low on criticism and praise) to girls and more evaluative (critical and praising) to boys -- a behavioral orientation which appears to reflect the teacher's own need value structure. Brophy and Good also explored the effects of teacher expectations on children's performance. They found that teachers gave more autonomy to those children they perceived as high achieving. Teachers were more directive to children perceived as low achieving. Wallen (1966) also found children achieving less with more controlling teachers whereas Soar (1968) reported beginning reading skills being enhanced by more direct teaching. Soar did find an optimal point in his data where different aspects of reading were learned more effectively with higher or lower amounts of teacher control. Soar sees teachers as varying their behavior according to the nature of the learning task particularly in the autonomy-control dimension. He suggests teachers should always be relatively non-critical, that is, warm.

In many of the preceding studies categories of teacher behaviors were observed as they occurred in the classroom or in relation to their effects on children. The investigators did not look for the source of these behaviors or discuss how they might be changed. Anastasiow (1969) viewed these behavior variables as reflections of the personality of the teacher. He concluded that any one teacher displayed a certain range of behaviors and that only limited shifts in these behaviors were possible. He cautioned against expecting all teachers to be able to display the necessary behaviors which are critical to certain curricula, especially where process goals are as important as literal content or specific knowledge goals. Efforts to shift the range of behaviors characteristic of Authoritarian teachers (high hostility and high control)

to that of Democratic teachers (low hostility and low control) met with little success in their study. Such efforts for change resulted in high stress and maladaptive responses from the teachers. However, the evidence of many studies discussed previously indicates that those investigators who instructed in method prescriptions helped most teachers to display an appropriate range of these behaviors in the classroom.

## Teacher Behavior as a Reflection of How Teachers Perceive Children's Abilities

Brophy and Good (1970) studied how teachers displayed differential expectations of children they perceived as high or low achieving. The children in this study had been assigned to nine classes according to objective measures of achievement and ability; therefore, the children were in fairly homogeneous classes. Yet, teachers placed them into ability groups according to their opinions of each child's potential achievement. Browne (1971) also found that teachers place children into low, medium, and high ability groups on the basis of little objective evidence. Her study supports Brophy and Good's findings that teachers provided different response opportunities for high and low groups according to their perception of their students' abilities. For example, high ability children were allowed to make open answers, applying divergent and reflective independent thought. Low ability children had to be specific and literal in response, providing objective, "right" answers. Therefore, low ability children were subject to more teacher correction.

An investigation of those aspects of children which are instigators of certain behaviors from teachers might be very enlightening, as would research designed to explore how children are different. In all of the studies described in this paper it is difficult to detect which behaviors

or perhaps physical characteristics are identified by teachers as individual differences or as contributing to low or high ability. The findings of some studies support the view that it is non-competence based. Chall and Feldman (1966) stated that where teachers paid attention to individual differences children did not achieve as well. Those individual differences must not be ones the teacher prefers when selecting children for high ability groups. Such differences for grouping, in fact, led to higher achievement. It seems there are individual differences which when attended to do in fact lead to lowered achievement as in the teacher's treatment of those placed in lower ability groups. Therefore, visible differences among children would be important to discover and study. Even if teachers did not group children, they would probably still behave toward them in relation to their expectations. Characteristics teachers consider indicative of lower level ability may prove to be important dimensions of complex achievement. Such characteristics do not apparently reflect child competence as much as what appears to be teacher preference.

## Some Additional Observations

The focus of teaching as discussed in the studies of this report is the overt, observable manifestation of certain categories of behavior. Investigators assigned specific behaviors to categories according, not to the intent of the actor, but to the way they were received. Thus teaching behaviors were assigned to categories as determined by how the student would receive them. Any attempt to influence teaching behaviors must help teachers take account of the student as receiver. Teachers should be aware of the reception categories used by the child to understand the implications of his or her acts. The teacher must initiate only those behaviors which the child can receive.

The concepts of Gestalt-Field theorists on figure ground occurrences and relationships provide us with a useful framework from which to study the above perspectives on classroom events. According to Gestalt theory, any complex situation which displays organization and relatedness of its parts provides a ground within which sub-wholes may be discovered and analyzed. One may study the whole situation or any of its patterned parts, that is, sub-wholes.

The instruments used for the various studies were selected by the investigators to describe and analyze the kind of figure they deemed significant on the ground of the classroom situation. For the most part, teacher's behavior in the classroom was studied. Child behavior when it was studied occurred predominantly in relation to teachers only, not in relation to other children. Some investigators (Morrison, 1968; Wallen, 1966; Kendrick and Bennett, 1966) hinted at the possibility of the child behaving as the initiator of the action in the classroom and occasionally even as an interactor with teachers and classmates.

The figures perceptible in the classroom situation for all of these investigators relate mainly to verbal interaction. Browne (1971) states that an assumption of the Flanders model is that teacher's verbal behavior provides an adequate sample of her total behavior. It must be assumed that these investigators see learning and teaching as occurring predominantly through verbal behavior. Yet, it is possible to conceive of children learning in a classroom with a mute teacher. Pursuing such a notion might open up whole avenues for helping children learn in an organized and patterned reading environment planned for children to be active in their learning. Possibly, many of the instruments used in the studies to date would not be adequate for studying the interaction of such a classroom,

or the discernible meaningful sub-wholes or figures within it. Children when first learning to read are only beginning to be pre-operational in their thought and still find most of their mental activity in the central correlates of direct, immediate, and sensorimotor action--not in verbal behavior.

These kinds of investigations are constraining forces on our perception of teacher behaviors because they report on the figure or sub-whole that they have selected from the classroom situation. Teachers perceive a figure of learning to read potential in children. We have little information about the observable data of these perceptions. Other researchers might see different figures within the same situation and certainly a change in the situation would result in an emergent different figure. Finally, are we preventing change in classroom teaching behaviors by introducing change only according to what we study?

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ABSTRACT---- READING

This study found 1) trained teachers displayed method prescriptions while untrained teachers did not; 2) teacher personality influences teaching behavior; and 3) teachers place children into reading ability groups according to some non-competence based (but unspecified) criteria as to their learning potential as teachers have difficulty gauging the ability level of children--especially those they judge as of either high or low ability. In addition, teachers were found to be the predominant actors in the classroom as they restrict quantitatively and qualitatively the participation of children. Teachers show very high rates of verbal behavior in early reading instruction. The potentials of child-child interaction are seldom recognized at a part of the learning situation. There is a need for future research to explore the visible attributes of children which teachers use for judging their learning potential, and to explore the kind of in-service training needed to promote the occurrence of teaching behaviors which help children to learn.

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